

Message Text

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ACTION NEA-10

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TAGS: PINT, PGOV, NP

SUBJ: PRIME MINISTER WARNS PRESS

1. PRIME MINISTER GIRI GAVE IMPORTANT ADDRESS TO NEPAL PRESS CLUB JANUARY 25 IN WHICH HE CALLED FOR "A NEW ERA OF DISCIPLINE IN ALL WALKS OF LIFE, INCLUDING THE PRESS". GIRI, IN A 40 MINUTE EXTEMPORANEOUS TALK, SAID THAT UNLESS THE PRESS VOLUNTARILY IMPOSED A "SENSE OF DISCIPLINE," THE GOVERNMENT WOULD BE FORCED TO TAKE "BITTER ACTION". HE CHARGED THAT SOME NEWS MEDIA, WHILE QUICK TO ATTACK OTHERS, FAILED TO SEE FAULTS IN THEMSELVES. NOTING THAT SOME NEWSPAPERS REMAINED BANNED, GIRI SAID THAT THE GOVERNMENT WOULD NOT TOLERATE "PREACHING AND PROPOGATION OF IDEOLOGIES ALIEN TO THE PANCHAYAT SYSTEM".

2. HE WAS QUICK TO NOTE THAT THE GOVERNMENT WELCOMED NO GOVERNMENT WAS 100 PERCENT CORRECT AND EXPRESSED THE HOPE THAT NEWSPAPERS AND OTHER MEDIA WOULD POINT OUT GOVERNMENT WEAKNESS "WHEREVER EVIDENCE EXISTS". HE URGED MEMBERS OF THE FOURTH ESTATE TO PRACTICE THEIR PROFESSION WITH A "DEEP SENSE OF RESPONSIBILITY, PARTICULARLY IN DEALING WITH FOREIGN COUNTRIES AND FOREIGN RELATIONS."

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3. COMMENT: JOURNALISTS, MINDFUL OF RESTRICTIONS PLACED ON THEIR INDIAN COLLEAGUES, APPEAR TO HAVE ACCEPTED GIRI'S REMARKS SOBERLY, AND ALTHOUGH ONE OR TWO HAVE PRIVATELY COMPLAINED THAT HIS SPEECH IS A PRELUDE TO A NEW PRESS CRACKDOWN, OTHERS WITH WHOM WE HAVE SPOKEN FEEL THAT HE WAS ONLY UNDERSCORING A POLICY LONG IN EXISTENCE. IN A SUBSEQUENT CONVERSATION WITH THE AMBASSADOR, GIRI HINTED THAT THE CURRENT BAN ON 5 PRO-INDIAN AND PRO-SOVIET NEWS-PAPERS WILL CONTINUE, DESPITE HOPES THAT HE WOULD ALLOW THEIR PUBLICATION FOLLOWING THE VISIT OF INDIAN FOREIGN MINISTER CHAVAN. NONETHELESS, THE GIRI SPEECH IS A CLEAR WARNING THAT THE GOVERNMENT HAS THE MEANS TO CONTROL THE PRESS AND WILL NOT HESITATE TO DO SO IF "IRRESPONSIBLE ATTACKS" ARE MADE ON FUNDAMENTAL ISSUES AFFECTING DOMESTIC AND FOREIGN POLICY. FOR THE MOMENT, MOST JOURNALISTS WE HAVE SPOKEN WITH INTEND TO CONTINUE ABOUT THEIR BUSINESS WITHOUT ALTERING EDITORIAL POLICY. IN POINT OF FACT THE PRESS HAS BEEN CONSIDERABLY MORE RESTRAINED SINCE LAST SUMMER WHEN A NEW PRESS LAW CAME INTO FORCE IMPOSING SEVERE PENALTIES ON PAPERS WHICH VIOLATE GOVERNMENT GUIDELINES.

4. IN A RELATED DEVELOPMENT IT WAS ANNOUNCED THAT MANA RANJAN JOSSE HAS BEEN NAMED ACTING EDITOR OF THE PRO-GOVERNMENT ENGLISH DAILY, RISING NEPAL. BHARAT DUTT KOIRALA HAS BEEN NAMED AS ACTING EDITOR OF THE NEPALI LANGUAGE EQUIVALENT, GORKHAPATRA. CARGO

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